The background of the entire cover is a dense, overlapping pattern of glass bottle bottoms, viewed from above. The glass is clear, and the circular shapes of the bases create a complex, textured pattern. A single, dark-colored bottle bottom is positioned centrally, standing out from the sea of clear ones.

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Addiction and the Spirit

The INQUIRER

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*From the Object passed at the
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Inquiring Words

God of the Autumn, help us to live
with the grace of falling leaves
the enthusiasm of the flaming Aspens
with the serenity of the old trees, whose roots reach deep into
the earth.

God of the Autumn, help us to know
that living and dying are one
that life is precious, and beautiful, and limited.
that nothing good is ever lost.

God of the Autumn, help us to see
in the ways of nature a way for ourselves.

Amen

— Christine C Robinson

Faith in Words: Peace

The annual Christmas issue of worship material, stories and meditations is coming up. In commemoration of the 100th anniversary of World War I, the theme for the issue is peace. Please send in prayers, addresses, meditations, art work, photographs – anything which is an expression of peace – to *The Inquirer*.

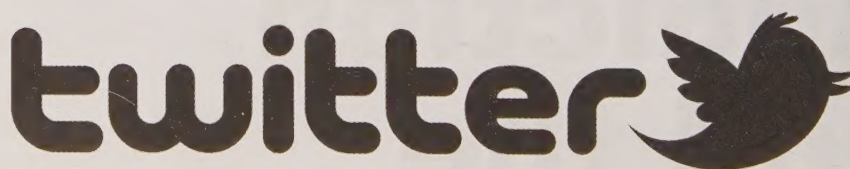
For more information or to submit material, email: **Inquirer@btinternet.com** Or, use the editor's postal address at left.

Material is due by 17 November

*If you don't have something to send in now,
contributions are, of course, welcome anytime.*

Correction

The Rev Pat Womersley's name was misspelled in the headline of her obituary published in the 11 October *Inquirer*. If any of the Rev Womersley's friends or family would like a copy of the corrected page, please send an email to **Inquirer@btinternet.com** and a printable PDF will be sent by return email.



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faith in 140 characters. <https://twitter.com/>

A spiritual approach to addiction

It doesn't matter if you call it 'Allah', 'Higher Power' or 'God' says **Tony Burns**, whose own faith brought comfort at his darkest time.

Many years ago I had a big problem with alcohol. By the grace of God and the programme of recovery which I work today to the best of my ability, I have not drunk alcohol since May 1984. So today, I still describe myself as a recovering alcoholic. I do not say this often in my day-to-day life as the perception of alcoholics by many people, whilst changing, is still often of the guy in a dirty mac, drinking whisky from a brown paper bag. With those alcoholics who are sober the reality is very different. They range from the rich and famous to the average man or woman in the street who is doing their best in life.

My experience, therefore, of addiction illnesses is primarily alcoholism. This affected my life and those of my family enormously when I was drinking. Families are destroyed by this illness. This may seem a very dramatic statement, but I could recount many stories of how this illness has affected families – husbands/wives/ sons and daughters dying from this illness, family break ups, working through the long-term effects of this illness and so on. Sadly, it is not a case of family members just getting over this, even if the alcoholic or addict gives up drinking and using. The emotional scars can remain for a long time.

So, over the 29 years since I stopped drinking alcohol, I have learnt a number of important things about the nature of this illness. I have learnt that there is a world of difference between the person who abuses or misuses alcohol and the alcoholic. The difference is that the behaviour of the alcoholic when he drinks may become increasingly erratic, becoming verbally and physically abusive to his family and friends and worse. Many alcoholics describe this as Jekyll and Hyde behaviour. This applies also to those who have other addiction illnesses.

The solution for millions around the world is 12-step programmes of recovery. Many people have heard of Alcoholics Anonymous and maybe Narcotics Anonymous.

Staying sober by talking

There are many others. AA was started by two Americans in 1935 – Bill Wilson and Dr Bob Smith. Bill was an investment banker in New York (a successful one until his alcoholism took hold) and Dr Bob a GP in Akron, Ohio. In 1935, soon after he had stopped drinking, Bill was on a business trip to Akron and desperately wanted a drink at the end of his business day but knew that he shouldn't. He suddenly thought that, if he could meet another person who also had a drink problem and they could have a chat, he was confident that he could make it through that evening without a drink. Eventually, he spoke to a priest who suggested that he contact Dr Bob (the priest inferring, so the story goes, that Dr Bob had a bit of a problem with alcohol). So, they both met and talked for more than four hours (Dr Bob initially said to Bill that he could give him only 15 minutes!). This was the first meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Both Bill and Dr Bob realised that, by talking about their problem with alcohol, they had remained sober that day. Since



Step two of the programme says: 'we came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity'.

then, millions of AA groups and other 12-step fellowships have sprung up around the world in most countries. Many addicts remain clean and sober by working programmes through their chosen religion or spiritual programme. AA and other 12-step fellowships do not have a monopoly of offering a programme of recovery.

A threefold illness

We say in AA that alcoholism is a threefold illness – physical, mental and spiritual. This description applies to other forms of addiction illness. As far as alcoholism is concerned, many people are aware that alcohol abuse can result in serious illnesses such as cirrhosis of the liver and heart disease. The effect of alcoholism on the mental condition of the alcoholic is not so commonly recognised. The alcoholic will progressively display symptoms of erratic behaviour which could develop into verbal and physical abuse – or worse.

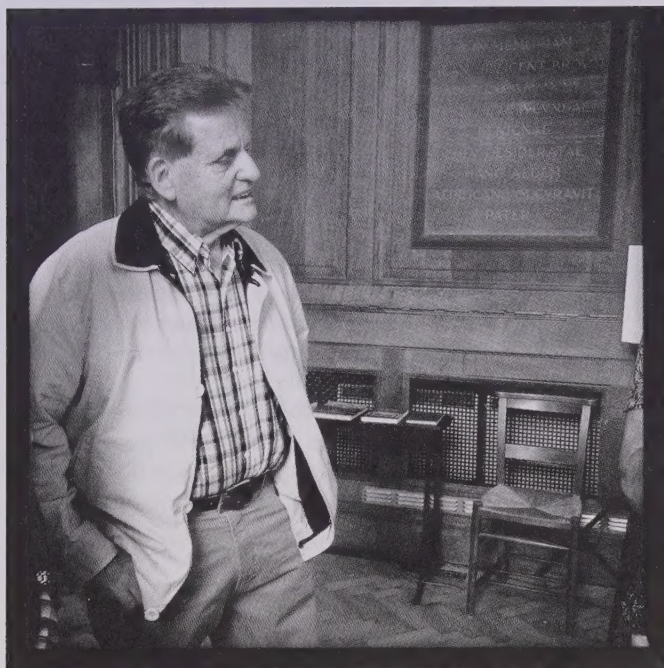
The 12-steps were written by Bill W and Dr Bob in the late 1930s. The first step says 'we admitted we were powerless over alcohol, that our lives had become unmanageable'. This step must be accepted totally by the alcoholic if they are going to stop drinking and stay stopped. We say in AA that it is the first drink which triggers the allergy or craving. The simple answer is not to pick up that drink – simple but often very difficult for the alcoholic. All the steps start with 'we' to remind the addict that he is not alone.

The spiritual part of this programme reflects its Christian origins, although it has been adapted for those with other religious beliefs or indeed no religious beliefs at all. We have to remember that the early members of AA were predominately Christian and white. The situation today is very different as there are AA and other 12-step fellowships in most countries. AA and other 12-step programmes of recovery are based on no particular religion and no religious belief is required. Spirituality doesn't have to imply a particular religion; to many in recovery using the 12-steps, it simply means that there is a power greater than ourselves upon which we can rely.

Whether addicts in recovery call this a Higher Power, God, Allah, or another name, it is vital to their recovery that they come to believe in a power greater than themselves. Step two of the programme says – 'we came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity'. Until addicts accept step two, the rest of the steps will not make much sense. Addicts, when they are using, rely totally on self-will even when they recognise that they drink too much, are using drugs or have other addictions. We often say that the active addict is 'self-will run riot'.

(Continued on next page)

Receiving a message from God



Tony Burns in the sanctuary of the Cambridge Unitarian Church. Photo by Andrew Brown

(Continued from previous page)

AA is spiritual – not religious

Many addicts in recovery – myself included – wish to call our higher power God. The 12 steps mention God six times. However, it is important always to recognise that this programme is not a religious one – spiritual, yes, but not religious. Some people view AA and other 12-step fellowships almost as a religious cult. This is far from the truth.

Step three says ‘we made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him’. This step is vital to the addict because he relies totally on his self will when using. The reference to ‘the care of God as we understood him’ reassures many addicts who seek recovery that this programme is not a religious programme and many substitute ‘God’ for something else.

The addict in recovery then continues to work the steps, recognising the damage he has caused others when he was using, admitting this damage to God, to themselves and to another human being which are steps four and five. Steps six and seven ask the addict to be ready for God to remove all his defects of character and to humbly ask God to remove them all. Steps eight and nine are the amends steps, as the addict must be ready, wherever possible, to make amends to those people he has harmed. For many addicts, their families are the most important people to whom they need to make amends. This was certainly the case with me. Step ten says ‘(we) continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted’. This programme is a programme of action on a daily basis and handing our will and lives over to God.

Step eleven says ‘(we) sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood him, praying only for knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry that out’. This step is so important as the addict must always remember that it was his self will which landed him into so much trouble – ‘thy will and not been done’.

Finally, step 12 says ‘having had a spiritual awakening as

the result of working these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs’. For addicts this is a programme of action, and of trying to hand his will and his life over to the care of the God of his understanding and to help those who still suffer.

Those whose lives have been affected by a close family member who has had an addiction illness find peace and serenity by working their own 12-step programme. Al-Anon was started by Lois Wilson, the wife of Bill Wilson, and some of her friends in the early 1950s. They realised they had been greatly affected by this illness. The programme of Al-Anon mirror images that of AA. It has the same 12-steps referring to alcohol only once (in step one). This programme is also deeply spiritual. I have met many who work this programme and are able to hand over to the God of their understanding the way this illness has affected them. They are truly to be admired.

Son of the manse lost sight of God

For me, the 12th step of recovery is deeply spiritual. Whilst I grew up in a Methodist church manse, and went to church two or three times on a Sunday, I had lost sight of God. Today, my spiritual programme and my reliance on God in my life have helped me to stay sober, to recognise my many defects of character (not always as quickly as I should do), to accept life on life’s terms and to help others. I would like to give you an example of how my spiritual programme has helped me. Some of you will know that my son Mark took his life just over three years ago. By his own admission, he was an alcoholic. He also had other mental health issues (some of which we as a family were aware of during his lifetime but others we only became aware of after his death). His life on a daily basis was very difficult for him. About two months after his death, I woke one morning and had what I can only describe as a spiritual awakening. God, that morning, told me that I should accept and respect what Mark did and that he is now at peace in his loving care. This message from God has remained with me since. I will continue to miss him and be sad that life became too much for him. But I will always respect him for what he did and to honour his memory and, above all, his bravery.

The Serenity Prayer is repeated at most 12-step meetings. It was originally written by Reinhold Niebuhr in the 1940s as part of a sermon. Niebuhr was an eminent American Protestant theologian. I have read that he is President Obama’s favourite theologian. The prayer which is said at most 12-step meetings has been slightly modified from the one which Niebuhr wrote. It says ‘God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference’. The full length of the prayer is not as well known but it is also very beautiful

‘God, give me grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things which should be changed, and wisdom to distinguish the one from the other. Living one day at a time, trusting that you will make all things right, if I surrender to your will, so that I may be reasonably happy in this life, and supremely happy with you forever in the next. Amen.’

Useful links:

www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk; www.oagb.org;

www.al-anonuk.co.uk; www.narcoticsanonymous.co.uk

Tony Burns is a member of Cambridge Unitarian Church.

Unearned and joyous, grace is a gift

Life is the greatest gift of all, the ultimate grace.

Grace is one of those words that has kept on cropping up in conversations I've been engaged with in recent weeks. It has got me thinking about what it might mean to me personally. What do I think of when I hear the word grace? What does it mean to live in a state of grace? What does it mean perhaps to die in a state of grace?

Grace is something I often think of at this time of the year, during early autumn. It was this time of year a long, long time ago when something began to change within my experience of life, something I will never understand ... something that when I re-member always brings a smile to my face ... a smile that comes unbidden.

Now I have heard it said that Unitarians don't do grace. Well this one does and I have spoken to many others who worship in our communities who do too. When I speak of grace, I mean something that exists beyond the confines of ourselves, something more that makes life real, special and alive. That 'something' exists beyond our individual efforts and makes our efforts almost effortless. I have noticed that when I live in a graceful state, life does indeed seem effortless. Indeed when life seems a slog or a struggle, it is precisely then that I feel blocked off from the grace that surrounds me. Grace seems to exist in the spaces of life, therefore when I am blocked it seems that there are no spaces where grace can thrive and live. To live in a graceful state is to trust in that which exists in those spaces and allow it to energise our lives. Over the years I have learnt to trust in this when the hard and dark times have struck. It is grace that keeps me moving forward. Grace is the "Wow!" of life that can energise us, if we but trust in it. It is grace that gives us a sense of belonging to life itself. When I began to live in grace I became fully a part of life. Now there are those who will, no doubt, claim that what I speak of is not grace at all. That I am just trying to re-invent the English language. (Well I wouldn't be the first now would I?)

Etymologically speaking grace is related to thankfulness, certainly in the Latin languages. Think of the Spanish 'gracias', the Italian 'grazie' and Latin 'gratia'. Both grace and gratitude are linguistically linked. One step beyond is the Latin word 'gratus' which means 'pleasing' and from which words like gratifying and gratuity are formed. On the other side of the coin comes the phrase 'persona non grata', which means an unwelcome person. Likewise a person who has fallen from grace may be known as a disgrace.

Grace is something that comes to us unbidden. It does not come because we have done anything to deserve it or not deserve it, it just comes. Life itself is probably the ultimate of graces. Think about it we did absolutely nothing to deserve the gift of life itself, in all its joy and suffering, in all its blessings and curses. Grace is about what we do with the gift we have been given; grace is what we create from what we have been given; grace is what we bring to the table of life with this gift we have been given.

Grace works in and through us. While we need not do anything to deserve it, we must do a great deal to bring it to life. As the Buddhist Joanna Macy observed, 'Grace happens when we act with others on behalf of our world.' Grace, an unseen force, exists in those spaces between our lives, and we experience it as it works through our lives, encouraging others to engage with it too. To dance in the spaces as the music of

From Nothing to Everything

by
Danny Crosby



life plays.

We can experience the grace present in life if we are open to it, if we would just let go of the need to control, to open our clenched fists just a little and dance with it in the spaces that contain life. We just need to pay attention, to notice it in life and in the lives of those who live in a graceful state. You see all life can become a disclosure of grace. We can experience it in every moment of life. In the wild embrace of one we hold most dear, in those flocks of wild geese that fly overhead, in an act of reconciliation and forgiveness, and in a selfless act as we give of ourselves to life.

We can all live in a 'state of grace'.

The Rev Danny Crosby is minister at Altrincham and Urmston.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR MINISTERS/LAY PASTORS AND/OR LAY PERSONS IN CHARGE

As a result of retirements, Merseyside Unitarian Ministry Partnership seeks to fill two vacancies with suitably capable & enthusiastic Ministers/Lay Pastors or Lay Persons in Charge.

VACANCY 1 From Early 2015 to serve Park Lane Chapel in Ashton in Makerfield (Nr Wigan), Cairo Street Chapel in Warrington and Matthew Henry Chapel in Chester.

VACANCY 2 From June 2015, to serve Ullet Road Church in Liverpool, Southport Unitarian Church and Wirral Unitarians.

Both appointees will contribute to - and be supported by - the Partnership of six churches (which has been working together for ten years) and the local District (the MDMA). Ministers/Lay Pastors will be paid the GA-recommended stipend + 10% with manse allowance. Other lay appointees will receive an attractive negotiated package based on their qualifications and experience. Help with removal costs will be available if needed.

For an information pack/ further details please contact Secretary Richard Merritt richardandhelenmerritt@hotmail.com (tel. 0151 625 5488). **By 31st January at latest** formal expressions of interest should be made by ministers or lay pastors via Rev Linda Phillips at the GA. Prospective Lay Persons in Charge should contact the Secretary directly. All such communication will be dealt with in strictest confidence.

Seven new ministers take

By Kate Taylor

This summer has seen seven newly qualified ministers emerge from the Unitarian training colleges. From Harris Manchester College, Oxford, have come John Carter, Jo James, Matthew Smith and Kate Whyman. Unitarian College, Manchester, has brought Maria Curtis, Anna Jarvis and Shammy Webster into the ministry.

They came to seek training from very varied backgrounds. None was born into a Unitarian family – although Jo James points out that his family roots are in the Unitarian heartland of Smotyn Ddu (Black Spot) in west Wales where there is a strong culture of dissent.

Jo has worked in the theatre since leaving Drama School in 1987. He has, *inter alia*, played for seasons with the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, the National Theatre, and the experimental Centre for Performance Research. From this last he encountered ‘Holy Theatre’ which, he explains, aimed to fill a vacuum which had been vacated by mainstream religion. It transformed his assumptions about the role of religion in his life. Working at the National Theatre, he began to attend Effra Road Chapel, Brixton, where the lay person in charge, Julian Smith, encouraged him to lead services.

John Carter, who came to England from the United States at the beginning of the century to be with his British partner, came from a background with the Historic Peace Churches – the Anabaptist traditions of the Mennonites and the Church of the Brethren. He studied for his first degree in California and has a Master’s degree from Bethany Theological Seminary. Once in England he searched for a church and, after not unpleasant encounters with Anglicans, he found his new home in 2007 at Croydon Unitarian and Free Christian Church.

John and his partner formalised their civil union in Vermont 14 years ago.

It was in 2003, while searching for somewhere where she and her partner Pat could have a religious ceremony to bond their relationship, that Shammy Webster discovered Unitarianism. Dunham Road Unitarian Chapel, Altrincham, was the only place of worship willing to answer her need. ‘Totally unchurched’ until then, she says, she had rejected the Christian model of her childhood but continued to feel that there was ‘something more than just birth, life, and death’. She had never heard of Unitarianism before, but found how much it supported and encouraged her in her spiritual search.

Dunham Road Chapel, together with Brook Street Chapel, Knutsford, has also brought Anna Jarvis into the ministry. Questioning the Methodist Church to which her family belonged, Anna went to the Altrincham chapel when she was 16. Within a couple of years she had been a delegate at the Unitarian General Assembly annual meetings, attended the Holiday Conference, taken some services, and followed a

course led by the Rev Celia Midgley called ‘Cakes for the Queen of Heaven’. She felt, she says, that she had come home. Studying for a degree, marriage, and childbirth followed. Returning to a more regular attendance at one or other of the two chapels, she enrolled for the Worship Studies Course, led by Dawn Buckle, in 2007.

You would not, perhaps, expect to encounter Unitarianism on a walking holiday in New Zealand. But that is how

Kate Whyman’s journey into ministry began. She had been brought up in the Church of England, turned to science and politics rather than religion, then developed a new interest in spirituality. In 1999, on the holiday, she heard about the movement when she met the sister of the then-minister at Brighton. When she got home, she checked out the church and never left.

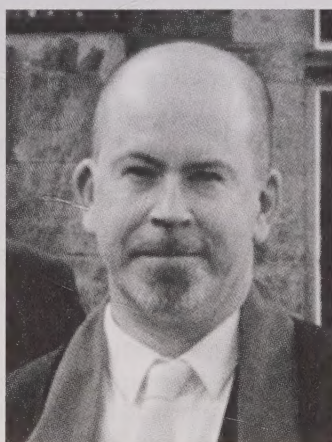
Maria Curtis, too, found Unitarianism through the Brighton Church. She had attended a high Anglican primary school in Ealing and been baptised and confirmed when she was 9. The family’s move to Worthing removed her faith, too. She became an atheist, although in the sixth form she found an interest in Buddhism. She had a career as a child-care officer and in teaching and gained a doctorate writing on children’s understanding of metaphorical language. Following further training, she worked for 20 years as an Educational Psychologist in Brighton. Maria knew Brighton Church only as a concert venue. (Kate Whyman, as it happens, ran a festival of world sacred music there for eight years.) Attending a rehearsal there as an amateur singer, she picked up a leaflet and ‘thought it made sense’. Five minutes into her first service there in 2005 she was ‘hooked’.

Serving as the General Assembly’s Information Officer from 1990-2004, Matthew Smith became a familiar figure to Unitarians across the United Kingdom. He was for many years a director of the Inquirer Publishing Company and was in at the formation of the Unitarian Communication Co-ordinators network, now restyled Unicom. But Matthew, too, had come to Unitarianism only as an adult. He had been baptised a Catholic but did not himself belong to any faith group until he found Unitarianism while studying for a B Ed at Homerton College, Cambridge. After leaving Essex Hall, Matthew served for eight years as a Senior Committee Officer for the London Borough of Waltham Forest.

What brought Matthew and the other six people into ministerial training? There has been practical experience especially



Anna Jarvis



Jo James



Matthew Smith

pulpits across the country

Being a minister, 'is about being a facilitator, negotiator, sounding board, events host, counsellor, and much more besides conducting services' — Anna Jarvis

in leading worship as lay people. And there has been conviction, a sense of vocation. Matthew says, 'I sensed a calling to support people in an honest spiritual search and in nurturing inclusive religious community.' Maria began leading worship at Brighton between Jane Barton's leaving and the appointment of Jeff Jones and undertook a congregational leadership course under David Usher. Following this, ministry 'felt right'. While taking the Worship Studies course, Anna Jarvis 'felt and understood' the call to ministry. Being a minister, she observes, 'is about being a facilitator, negotiator, sounding board, events host, counsellor, and much more besides conducting services'. Despite a varied career in teaching, writing, and running her own public-relations business, Kate Whyman always felt that 'something was missing'. It has now been found.

It was while taking services at Brixton that Jo James recognised a calling to turn his focus away from himself and to serve the congregation. Julian Smith steered him towards training. His student placements, at Bridport and Hinckley, brought him into contact with thriving communities, exploring worship together and willing to adapt and expand. John Carter had already studied for ministry in America and was quickly recruited to take services soon after finding a spiritual home at Croydon. He went on to be lay person in charge at Lewisham Unitarian Meeting in 2010. There, the call to ministry was rekindled. He is spurred by the potential of Unitarianism. 'With our feet in our Christian heritage and our openness to the explorations of faith, belief, and spirituality that humanity expresses and experiences, we are placed to foster and work for peace and understanding in our increasingly fragmented world', he observes.

For Shammy Webster, ministers are 'Medics of the spirit'. She notes that the secular world focuses on improving bodies and minds but ignores the health of our connection with 'the greater picture of life'. She adds that 'we need to care for the whole person, the human trinity of body, mind and spirit'.

Between 2010 and 2011, Shammy served as the lay person in charge at New Chapel, Denton. During training she



Kate Whyman



Shammy Webster

had a placement at Rochdale Unitarian Church and, following the retirement of the Reverend Gillian Peel, she is now its full-time minister.

Following the Rev David Usher's move to the United States, John Carter has been serving as an interim District Minister for the London District and South Eastern Provincial Assembly, and recently became minister at Edmund Kell Unitarian Church, Southampton.

For congregations without ministers, who welcome the chance to engage one from a nearby chapel to take some services, it might seem a happy chance that our newcomers are based quite widely. Matthew Smith is in East Anglia, with a full-time position at the Suffolk meeting houses at Bury St Edmunds and Framlingham.

Jo has been called to Yorkshire to Mill Hill Chapel, Leeds (a 'jewel of a building', he says), where his induction will take place on 8 November.

Studying in Manchester, Maria Curtis had a placement with Stephen Lingwood at Bolton before working as student pastor at Old Chapel, Dukinfield. She has returned to the South as half-time minister at Horsham.

Anna has followed Maria at Dukinfield, undertaking an initial six-month placement, and has also been involved in the Movement more widely in co-running the October Junior weekend at Great



Maria Curtis



John Carter

Hucklow. In the South-west, Kate Whyman is now serving in a half-time capacity at Plymouth Unitarian Church.

The new ministers all bring conviction, a breadth of experience and many skills and talents. They include parents, managers, musicians, teachers, writers and a stage performer. One claims to be 'more than a little unconventional'. Perhaps they all are! You have to have a sense of adventure to be a Unitarian at all.

We are fortunate to have them and the fresh air they bring.

I wonder whether we deserve them! So many of our congregations are unable to support professional ministry, financially. Are we contributing anything like enough money to our own places of worship and to the Movement as a whole? Do we adopt realistic strategies to attract newcomers?

It may be all very well to invite one of the new ministers to visit and enchant us, but are we insulting their dedication when we provide a mere half-dozen people to hear them?

Kate Taylor is a member of Westgate Chapel, Wakefield.



Christmas came early for Music Society

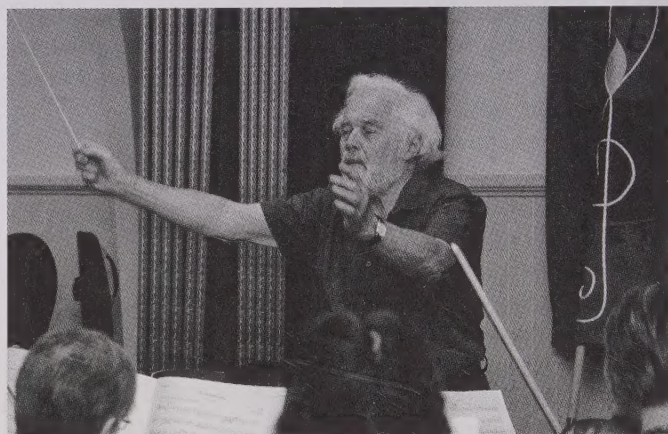
By Lyanne Mitchell

The first thing you notice when you arrive at the Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre, Great Hucklow for a Unitarian Music Society gathering is that music is *everywhere* – the sounds of singing, various strings, recorders, etc. can be heard floating out of every doorway. Music seems to ooze out of the woodwork!

Our 'Big Work' this year for chorus and orchestra was Haydn's 'Creation' (part 1). And, oh, was it exhilarating to sing and play! Chorus, soloists and orchestra rehearsed separately, then, on Sunday, we all came together and performed it to the best of our ability. Although our 'audience' numbered only 3 or 4, this did not matter because the whole object of the exercise was the pleasure, considerable satisfaction and sense of achievement in learning this great work. Our conductor, David Dawson, worked us hard, pushing and stretching us to try harder but always with gentle charm and humour.

The highlight for me, (within a weekend of highlights) was Nick Morrice's excellent illustrated talk about 'Papa Haydn' – his life and work. I learned much I did not know about the great man who was a contemporary and teacher to the younger Mozart and Beethoven. Nick's talk was interspersed with passages of Haydn's music, played on piano by David Dawson, on violin by Adrienne Wilson and on cello by Jenni Duffel. This was an outstanding performance, played with sparkling energy and sensitivity. It must have taken many, many hours of individual practice, and yet the three musicians only came together to play at the weekend. Unforgettable!

The programme was full and varied. There were sessions on madrigals, music for worship, Unitarian TV, children's singing games, a DVD about Haydn and a Cole Porter sing-song.



David Dawson conducts and (above) the UMS enjoyed a performance. Photos by James Barry

There was something for all tastes.

I thoroughly enjoyed our two light-hearted concerts, featuring the vocal and instrumental talents of our attendees – which were considerable. On Sunday morning, we raised the rafters of Hucklow's Old Chapel, contributing introit, anthem, and lusty four-part hymn singing to the service.

Monday morning was Christmas in August!

We performed a selection of carols as the UMS 'Happy Christmas' greeting and this was filmed and recorded by the Unitarian TV team. We even had a large, fully decorated Christmas tree from the Nightingale Centre garden. The Closing Circle was very special and moving for me. The readings and hymns seemed to reflect all the warmth and harmony of a glorious weekend together.

Lyanne Mitchell is a member of the Glasgow congregation.

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www.osif.org.uk



Funny old Xmas list: toilet and jazz

I really thought this was a mistake. A surprise bulletin from South Africa correspondent Gordon Oliver: 'Last weekend I participated in the ordination of a South African woman as a Catholic priest.' I knew that a recent gathering of Roman Catholic bishops had discussed all manner of controversial issues, but I certainly didn't think they had rushed through acceptance of the ordination of women. Gordon continues, 'Of course the local hierarchy of the RC Church huffs and puffs quietly about this. It's a growing international movement, known simply as Roman Catholic Women Priests. The officiating bishop at this ordination is also a woman, a former Dominican nun who lectured at the Catholic Seminary in Pretoria, SA for many years. Her brother is a member of the Cape Town Unitarian Church. At his suggestion, some years ago, I invited her to address a Sunday morning service in our church.'

Now it makes sense. Gordon is no stranger to controversial territories. The movement's website tells it all:

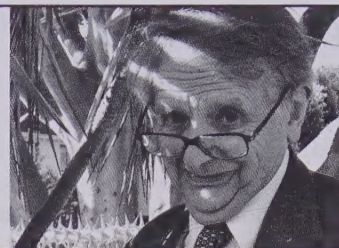
Roman Catholic Women Priests is a renewal movement within the Church that began in Germany with the ordination of seven women on the Danube River in 2002. In 2003, two of the original Danube 7 were ordained bishops... Women bishops, ordained in Apostolic Succession, continue to carry out the work of ordaining women in the Roman Catholic Church... Currently there are over 145 ordained Roman Catholic women worldwide who are reclaiming their ancient spiritual heritage and are re-shaping a more inclusive, Christ-centred Church for the 21st century. We advocate a new model of priestly ministry, united with the people with whom we serve. We are rooted in a response to Jesus who called women and men to be disciples and equals, living the Gospel.

Their campaign song is 'We are Standing on the Shoulders of Giants'. The accompanying video depicts heroic freedom-fighters of the past, including Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Rosa Parks, Sojourner Truth and yes, at least one Unitarian, Susan B Anthony. All those presently involved in this movement are, of course, excommunicated *latae sententiae* (automatically). Sounds like a lively minority movement getting on with doing what they want, and what they believe is right, waiting for orthodoxy to catch up. It has a familiar ring to it.

Strange, how names keep popping up. Turning the pages of *The Inquirer* for 13 September I enjoyed reading Matthew Smith's report of the June 2014 Annual Meetings of the Ministerial Old Students Association, at Harris Manchester College, Oxford. A guest speaker at this event was the Rev Dr Martyn Percy, at that time Principal of Ripon College, Cuddesdon. He encouraged Unitarians not to be anxious about their small numbers, and spoke positively about the validity of the liberal religious voice that Unitarianism offers. His name jumped out at me again a few weeks later whilst listening to BBC Radio3, at what for me is the sacred hour of 5pm on Saturday. The programme is *Jazz Record Requests*, and on 4 October a request by the Very Rev Dr Percy was played. He dedicated it to his former colleagues at Ripon College, and also to his new friends at Christ's College, Oxford, where he has just been appointed Dean. This was aired on the very day and hour of his installation to this post. His choice of record

Funny Old World

By
John Midgley



was 'Resolution' from the album *A Love Supreme*, by John Coltrane, which, he pointed out is reckoned to be a homage to the poetic preaching that Coltrane grew up with. 'And I'll be preaching while this programme is being broadcast,' the new Dean added.

So, we have the Dean of an Anglican, Oxford College who is not averse to mingling with Unitarians, whose wife is also ordained (no fear of her being excommunicated!); she serves as Chaplain at Trinity College Oxford. He has a long list of theological books and achievements to his credit and has served on various public bodies, including the Advertising Standards Authority. His latest book is *The Thirty-Nine New Articles: An Anglican Landscape of Faith* (2013).

And he obviously enjoys jazz at 'the sacred hour'. His choice of John Coltrane might make some readers and listeners wince a little. When I mention jazz, the usual response is, 'Well I like some jazz, but I can't stand this modern, doodly-oodly stuff. I like to recognise the tune.' Coltrane falls into that troublesome category; definitely 'doodly-oodly', not easily accessible to inexperienced ears, and not obviously melodious. Then again, some people think academic theology is rather like that.

From the gleaming spires of high-church Oxford – to life's down-to-earth basics. In the toilet of our local Friends Meeting House hangs a small picture a latrine with a corrugated iron roof. This Quaker toilet is twinned with the latrine in a third world country. The website toilettwinning.org has the persuasive information:

Toilet Twinning is raising funds to enable people living in poor communities to have clean water, a decent toilet, and to learn about hygiene – a vital combination that prevents the spread of disease, reduces the number of deaths among children, and brings hope for the future. For a £60 donation, you can twin your toilet at home, work, school or church with a latrine in Africa or Asia.

Diarrhoea, which lack of decent toilets brings, seems a minor matter compared with the appalling ebola virus. Actually it isn't minor, and there is a case for supporting efforts to combat both. A fundraising charity sale of paintings for Médecins sans Frontières (Doctors without borders, on the front line in the battle against ebola) will be held on Sunday 7 December at her Avondale Gallery, by Judy Gilley, widow of the late Keith Gilley, former *Inquirer* editor (www.judygilleyart.co.uk). A gift from that sale would make a delightful Christmas present, as would a framed picture of a sponsored third world toilet. If I gave something like that I might be considered eccentric, but then, I also enjoy jazz.

The Rev John Midgley is a retired Unitarian minister.

Letters to the Editor

Resolutions serve a good purpose

To the Editor:

Re Stephen Lingwood's article 'What are resolutions for'?

Resolutions have two major functions – to inform or educate us, and to enable us to formulate a policy about something – social, national, internal, which can then be used to guide the denomination in its relationship with our governance, our fellow religionists, the national stage. It is indeed very disappointing if congregations fail to send a delegate to the Annual Meetings or even to debate the resolutions – perhaps everyone who reads *The Inquirer* should make sure that their congregation does indeed do one or other or both!

But Stephen Lingwood asks what is the point of resolutions if they are not followed up? We will know what's happening about social policy resolutions when the Chief Officer starts talking about them in public, and governance ones when they are discussed by the Executive Committee. We know less about the inform-and-educate ones, although we have just

had a splendid example – assisted dying. The motion came to the Annual Meetings, was sent back to the proposers who followed up with a well-written paper. The motion returned to the meetings and was then passed. This now comes up against Stephen's question – what now? Resolutions like this are of national importance and perhaps we need to be reminded of that through *The Inquirer*. It may be that all motions of social justice should start in the same way – be put to the Annual Meetings and, if passed, followed up with a fuller paper and then put to the Annual Meetings the next year. Perhaps all resolutions should be reported on by the proposers the following year!

Rosemary Ruston

Watford

IARF decries ISIS violence

The Congress of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) calls for united action against the greatest current threat to religious freedom. All religious communities and international communities as well as the United Nations, are called to stand up against the heinous acts of ISIS, killing or driving from their homes thousands

of Yezidi, Christians, Shiites and others. Ancient churches and mosques, religious and cultural heritage sites, are being destroyed. We join faith leaders in declaring 'what we are witnessing in Northern Iraq today is a tragedy of historic proportions in which thousands of innocent people are in immediate risk of death for no other reason than their religious beliefs.' (*Telegraph* 21 Aug)

'Not in our name', the Muslim Council of Britain, declares: 'We urge Muslim communities to redouble their efforts in coming together, condemning the barbarity of ISIS.'

In our IARF Congress, representatives of religious groups reported many violations of Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Congress affirms: 'There is no freedom without responsibility.' These continuing attacks on Human Rights (and especially those on minorities throughout the world) are a threat to religious freedom and all humanity. Therefore: Let us respond to these attacks with both action and compassion so that Religious Freedom becomes a reality, peace may prevail on earth, and all the peoples of the world shall be free.

Robert Papini and Richard Boeke

Resolutions are a waste of GA's time

By Carol Palfrey

I heartily endorse the views expressed in Stephen Lingwood's timely and well-argued article about Unitarian General Assembly motions in the 27 September issue of *The Inquirer*.

We are fortunate to have within the Unitarian movement people like Stephen who are not afraid to raise issues which may provoke controversy. If we are to be a faith community which is vibrant, progressive and relevant to the needs of the 21st century, we must have the courage to question what we do and why we do it. Just because we have always done something doesn't mean that it should continue unchallenged.

I share Stephen's proposal that we need to consider the purpose of debating and voting on motions at our General Assembly. It often seems that motions are proposed just for the sake of it and, as for the wording, don't get me started on that! What are we hoping to achieve?

One example of an 'inappropriate' motion which springs immediately to mind is the proposal in 2013 that should designate a specific Sunday in October each year as Unitarian Peace Day with the intention that congregations should hold a service on the topic. The motion was passed but this does not make it mandatory for every congregation to celebrate this event. Indeed, my own congregation in Norwich voted against it and therefore had no intention of putting it into practice, whatever

the outcome at the GA. What status has a motion of this nature in our diverse community of individualistic congregations? The idea of designating a special day could have been suggested as an idea that congregations might discuss and possibly adopt rather than proposed as a formal motion requiring a vote.

I am still not certain that we should have addressed the issue of assisted dying in the form of a motion. I am certainly in favour of encouraging discussion on this sensitive matter and the detailed background information provided was extremely helpful. I know that some members felt unable to support the motion for reasons of conscience and I do not therefore feel that the final decision of the GA had true validity. The Quakers and, I believe, the Liberal Jews did not adopt an 'official position' and I think they were wise.

It also seems pointless to adopt any motion condemning atrocities on the national or international stage, for example the current atrocities being perpetrated by IS or the child abuse scandal in Rotherham – unless there is a clear plan of action for Unitarians to undertake which might help to achieve a resolution. In situations like this, there is little we can do other than protesting against military intervention (but this is only relevant to individuals committed to opposing the use of arms in all circumstances), writing to MPs or offering accommoda-

(Continued on next page)

The Rev Ian Smith: A fine example

By Vernon Marshall

On 25 August, Unitarianism lost one of its most well-liked ministers when Ian Smith died at a hospital in Cyprus, the country he and Phillipa had made their home for the last eight years. It was a privilege to be part of his funeral service at the Blackley Crematorium in Manchester, where tributes were paid also by his three children, Alexandra, Kate and Richard.

Ian was a proud 'Cestrian', a child of the county of Cheshire, a place where his mother Kath, a Unitarian stalwart herself, still lives. He was brought up in a happy home where his father, a senior officer in the Fire Service, headed a large family. Ian always hankered after a life in the police force and, after school, made attempts to join. It was as a civilian member of the finger printing section that he served, however, and he eventually began to envision a different career for himself. He entered the Unitarian College, Manchester when he was 27 and spent four years in training.

Ian's ministries were successful in that he was well liked, even loved, as witnessed by the fact that his former congregations have held their own memorial services for him. He had 12 years with the Stalybridge church, together with Mossley, followed by 12 years at Blackpool and Lytham St Anne's, and then finally seven years in Kendal. Ian then retired early on health grounds, his life having been dogged by a bipolar disorder that seriously affected both him and his family.

Ian's life was not always easy. His illness took its toll and he had a number of spells in hospital. He and Jan divorced when his children were still young and he thus did not share as much time with them as he would have wished. His life greatly

improved when he met and then married Phillipa. They were married for 23 years.

Ian Smith will be remembered as warm-hearted and generous. He was very skilled in a number of ways. I remember visiting him in Cyprus and he had been spending time painting. He showed me a painting he thought was a poor attempt at a bird. I thought it was brilliant, but that demonstrates something of the self-effacing manner of the man. He was also a good singer and a fan of Elvis Presley. One occasion I remember was an overnight meeting in Great Hucklow of the Ministerial Fellowship. He brought some electronic equipment with him and entertained the rest of us with an evening of singing his favourite songs.

Ian had a wry sense of humour. On one occasion in Cyprus, when we were all dozing on the beach under a fierce sun, I began to quote those lovely words, 'I must go down to the sea again, to the lonely sea and the sky...' and Ian jumped in to complete those words with the Spike Milligan version, 'I left my shoes and socks there, I wonder if they're dry.'

If ever there was such an animal as a 'people-person' then it was Ian. When he was minister in Stalybridge he once showed me round the town centre. A number of passers-by would stop to talk to him. The owner of a café we visited gave us a free cup of tea and a bun. The local funeral director begged him to take on more requests to conduct funerals. Ian Smith was a lovely man who loved his work as a minister, who loved his family, and who adored his wife. What a fine example of a man.

The Rev Dr Vernon Marshall is minister at Unity Church, Bolton and Stand Chapel, Whitefield.

Create criteria for new GA motions

(Continued from previous page)

tion to refugees or those with nowhere else to go. It surely goes without saying that we deplore the actions of IS and the system which failed those who suffered abuse, so what would a motion do other than to state the obvious?

There are, however, certain issues, such as our campaign for same sex marriage, where the passing of a motion was necessary to give our Chief Officer a mandate to lobby government on our behalf on this important matter of principle which goes to the heart of Unitarianism. Motions are also appropriate where internal policies are concerned.

I am not, therefore, suggesting that we abandon the concept of motions altogether, and I don't think that Stephen is either. It is my view that a 'Screening Group' of individuals, representative of the wider movement, should be established to draw up a list of criteria which must be fulfilled before a motion is deemed appropriate to be put to the AGM. The criteria could include:

- What would be achieved if the motion were passed?
- Is there any specific and meaningful action which would follow from this motion?
- Based on past experience, how likely is it that congregations will follow through with this action?
- What effect, at the national level, would it have if the nation were informed that such a motion had been

passed by the Unitarians?

- Does the motion relate to an internal matter and, if so, is this the best way to resolve the situation? (I am reminded of the motion about the notice on the exterior of Essex Hall!).

I am sure the group could come up with many more criteria.

I strongly believe that our time together at the GA – the only time in the year when a significant number of us gather together – could be used for more fruitful and in-depth discussion about issues of real importance in which everyone who wished to have a turn at the microphone had a chance to state their views (succinctly!) and no one was refused because we had run out of time. Discussions of this nature would not conclude in a vote.

So, where do we go from here? Stephen has raised the issue but is this going to be followed up? I would hate to feel that it was yet another good idea which came up and then disappeared without trace. Perhaps the Executive Committee could discuss this issue and consider inviting interested members of the Unitarian movement from our congregations to join a working group to take things forward. Alternatively, this would make an ideal topic for discussion at the GA – but certainly not in the form of a motion!

Carol Palfrey is a member of the the Octagon Chapel, Norwich

Folk CD to benefit children's holidays

By Ernest Baker

A CD has just been released: *We're Folk And We're Singing: Unitarian Young People's League Folk Sessions from the 1960s* – including material previously released only on limited-edition vinyl. The first 14 tracks were recorded at Wythenshawe Unitarian Church, Manchester at the Unitarian Young Peoples League (UYPL) annual Drama Festival on Saturday, 20 March 1965. The next 12 tracks were recorded during the UYPL's Manchester Region Annual January Weekend at Great Hucklow on Friday, 26 January 1968. All the proceeds of CD sales will be donated to 'Send a Child to Hucklow', (SACH) the charity which provides holidays for underprivileged children.

Within UYPL, the traditional 'sing-song' had, by the mid-1960s, morphed into a folk-session, such as those found in the many folk-clubs which thrived at that time. With one or two exceptions, the songs on this CD are either traditional folk-songs or songs written by 20th-century folk-singers. But even if a song wasn't a folk-song in the true sense, it became one when people sang it!

As John Allerton can be heard observing on track 6 in the introduction to 'Favourite Things', "We're folk and we're singing." As the enthusiastic audience participation shows, many of these songs were well known favourites at UYPL gatherings.

In the 1960s, UYPL was a truly national Unitarian youth organisation, run by young people for young people between the ages of 14 and 30. The basic unit was the local church-based youth group or branch. Branches were gathered into regions, which in turn constituted the national movement, whose 'spiritual home' was Great Hucklow.

When UYPL held events there, folk-singing was by no means the only music to be heard! And on Sunday mornings



We're Folk and We're Singing

UYPL



March 1965

Jan 1968

the Old Chapel was packed with young Unitarians, raising the roof with their spirited rendition of the UYPL hymn, 'Lord of the wondrous earth' (now number 1 in the green hymnal, 'Hymns for Living'), written in the 1930s by UYPL's first National President, Arthur Vallance.

Just in time for Christmas! The CDs can be ordered for a minimum donation of £7, with free postage and packing, from the SACH Honorary Secretary, the Rev Ernest W S Baker, 145 Tullibardine Road, Greystones, Sheffield S11 7GN Or contact him: Tel: 0114 2661070, email: secretary@sendachildtohucklow.org.uk

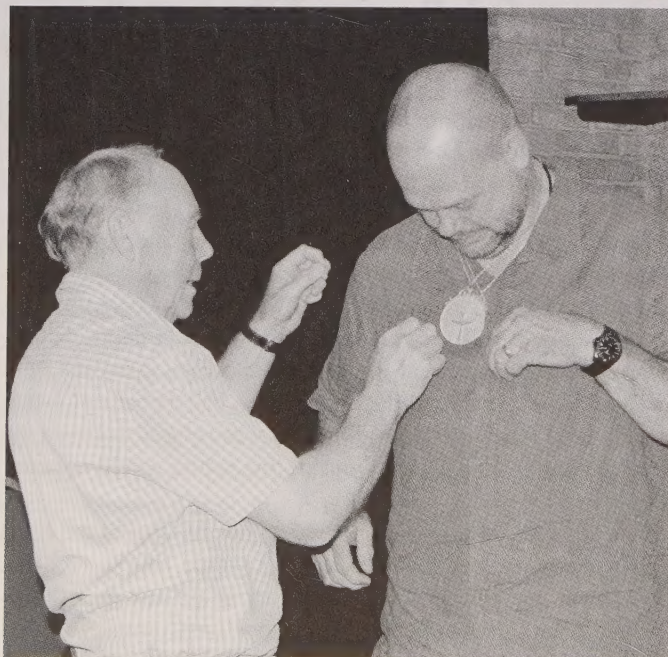
Ullet Road hosted meditation day

With its art room, hall, cloisters and cloister garden, Ullet Road Church is an excellent spot for shared meditations. The art room is ideal for sitting practice whilst all the other spaces give sufficient places for mindful walking. In September, 21 people attended a day-long retreat led by Ajahn Amaro, abbot of Amaravati (Berkhamsted), mother-house of 11 Theravada monasteries in the western hemisphere. This event was the latest in a series of retreats held every six months at Ullet Road and led by experienced nuns and monks.

The day is passed mostly in silence and usually ends with a talk.

Venerable Amaro scrapped the talk but instead gave a 25-minute response to one of the participant's questions. This impromptu 'sermon' elucidated the various ways of quelling anger using scriptural references, jokes and personal anecdotes some of which made the listeners gasp with surprise – a model of Buddhist/Socratic method: only hold forth when asked a question. As a venue, Ullet Road seemed especially appropriate as it was a Unitarian Church – Prague – which invited the first monastic of this tradition to enter Eastern Europe and teach after the fall of communism.

– By Graham Murphy, who recently published a guide to assist discursive meditations when visiting the Celtic Christian sites of Gwynedd – 'Land of Sacred Legends', Sigma Press



Jim Timiney (Bradford) installs Stephen Carlile (Wakefield) as his successor as President of the Yorkshire Unitarian Union Lay Preachers Association at a meeting of the group at Hull Unitarian Church on 11 October. The session was led by Kate Taylor (Wakefield) who prompted a discussion on how to organise an interfaith gathering for prayers for peace. Members then composed appropriate readings.